

THE QUESTION OF RELIGION AND YOUTH

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AGAINST SUPERSTITIONS AND PREJUDICES. -- We Reply to Readers' Questions. (Komsomolskaya pravda, April 25, p.3. 1900 words. Condensed text:) Dear Editors: When an elderly man believes in God and performs religious rites, that is understandable: he received his education before the revolution; here we have survivals of the past and mere force of habit. We also see young people studying in ecclesiastical seminaries and explain this by their exceptional backwardness. But we have occasion to meet individual boys and girls who have grown up and been educated just like all our young people, but who have religious prejudices and believe in some sort of "spirit", believe in "fate." Where do they get those beliefs.

We consider that to believe in God is to doubt science, to doubt one's own powers. Can our young people really have any such doubts? And it is strange to hear some people's assurances that religion does not hinder communism. In our opinion this is political shortsightedness. Is our reasoning correct? -- Mikhail and Alexander Markov, Kiev.

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Your reasoning is quite correct, Comrades.

Religion cannot help hindering the building of communism, for it represents an antiscientific, reactionary ideology. Religion gives a fantastic, false and perverted idea of nature and society; its views on our environment contradict the true state of affairs, the indisputable facts of science and the vital experience of human practice. Religion prevents man from understanding the laws of the development of nature and society, educates him in a spirit of humility and submissiveness, inspires him with a blind faith in divine providence. Religion thereby distracts man from revolutionary change, instills in the masses the idea of the impossibility of changing an order of life alleged to have been established by God. ...

Why, then, ask some readers, do churches exist in our country, why is not religious preaching prohibited? This very question is raised by Young Communist League Member A. Lavrischchova (Korch).

For the very reason that neither closing down the churches nor prohibiting the performance of church ceremonies are effective measures for combating religion: nor are they recognized by the Communist Party and Soviet State. The attitude of Marxism-Leninism toward such means of combating religion was always sharply negative.

The U.S.S.R. is a genuinely democratic state. The Soviet Constitution guarantees all citizens freedom of conscience and recognizes both their freedom to perform religious ceremonies and freedom of antireligious propaganda. The Communist Party is interested in all the working people, regardless of their attitude toward religion, uniting their efforts in labor and the struggle for the common aim--the happiness and prosperity of the homeland, the maintenance of world peace and the deliverance of mankind from the threat of the new war which is being strenuously instigated by the imperialists.

All this, however, must not be taken to mean that we non-believers are indifferent to the existence of religious survivals, that our Party is neutral

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toward religion. "The Party cannot be neutral in relation to religion," Comrade Stalin has explained, "and it carries on antireligious propaganda against all and any religious prejudice because it stands for science, while religious prejudice goes against science, for any religion is diametrically opposed to science."

The Party, as has been pointed out time and again by Lenin and Stalin, combats religion by the only correct, ideological means--educational work, conviction, elucidation, wide-scale propaganda of political and scientific knowledge. This work must be carried on without offending the feelings of those who believe; the reactionary and antiscientific essence of religious ideas must be patiently and convincingly explained to them.

Soviet youth, reared by the Communist Party in the spirit of the Marxist-Leninist world view, is advanced, cultured and educated: it is growing and finding fresh forces, it is completely free from any superstitions and prejudices whatsoever. But individual young people are still to be encountered who go to church, go through the marriage ceremony, trustingly listen to the "predictions" of fortune tellers, and believe in dreams and various auguries.

Where do they get these beliefs? ask Mikhail and Alexander Markov in surprise. Our boys and girls do not live their lives isolated from society, do they? And inasmuch as society is not yet finally purged of survivals, traditions and customs of the past which have lived on in the minds of people these viable, tenacious survivals are in individual cases assimilated by young people as well. This takes place as a result of incorrect education and under the influence of backward attitudes.

Instances of this kind cannot be tolerated. They should give rise to concern in the young people and the Y.C.L. organization in whose midst they occur.

Assisting the Party in the communist education of young people, the Young Communist League is expected to fight to overcome survivals of the past in the minds of the young, including religious survivals. This work must not be carried out as a campaign, but day in and day out, purposefully and persistently. Popular science lectures and reports on the structure of the universe, on the origin of life on earth, on the origin of man and other themes should be given for young people, the achievements of Soviet science and technology should be widely publicized, meetings arranged with scientists and specialists, popular science literature disseminated. Boys and girls should be told of the harmfulness of religious prejudices; a scientific, materialist outlook should be fostered in them.

Where mass cultural, educational work is conducted haphazardly, the influence of priests not infrequently increases. Sometimes one hears a Y.C.L. official complaining that certain young people in his village go to church. It never occurs to him that the village club is working badly or is shut down and that no one is properly concerned about the young people's leisure time or about satisfying their needs. And in such cases one should not be surprised, but energetically organize education work and develop extensive militant atheist propaganda.

Can a Y.C.L. member believe in God or even, at the insistence of relatives and friends, take part in the performance of religious ceremonies, such as weddings and christenings? Readers N. Khodyrova (Stalingrad Province),

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E. Ostroushenko (Liepava) and others ask this. Is this not a violation of the Young Communist League bylaws? Most certainly it is.

There are people who reason thus: We have freedom of conscience; it is the personal affair of each person whether he believes or does not believe in God; therefore the Y.C.L. member also can decide this question for himself according to his own judgment. Such reasoning is profoundly mistaken. For the Y.C.L. member, just as for the Communist, attitude to religion can in no way be a "personal matter," since religious conceptions are foreign to our communist outlook.

The question of the attitude of the Y.C.L. member to religion must be decided with full strictness and principle. The Y.C.L. bylaws oblige a Y.C.L. member to struggle against the remnants of religious prejudices. Belief in God and participation in church ceremonies are incompatible with membership in the Y.C.L. There can be no compromises here. The Y.C.L. member is an advanced, cultured person, free from prejudices and superstitions, and his task is to wage an irreconcilable struggle against survivals of the past and for Bolshevik education of vigorous and high-spirited young builders of communism.

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